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Johnston - Sketch of Dr. John Peter Mettaller
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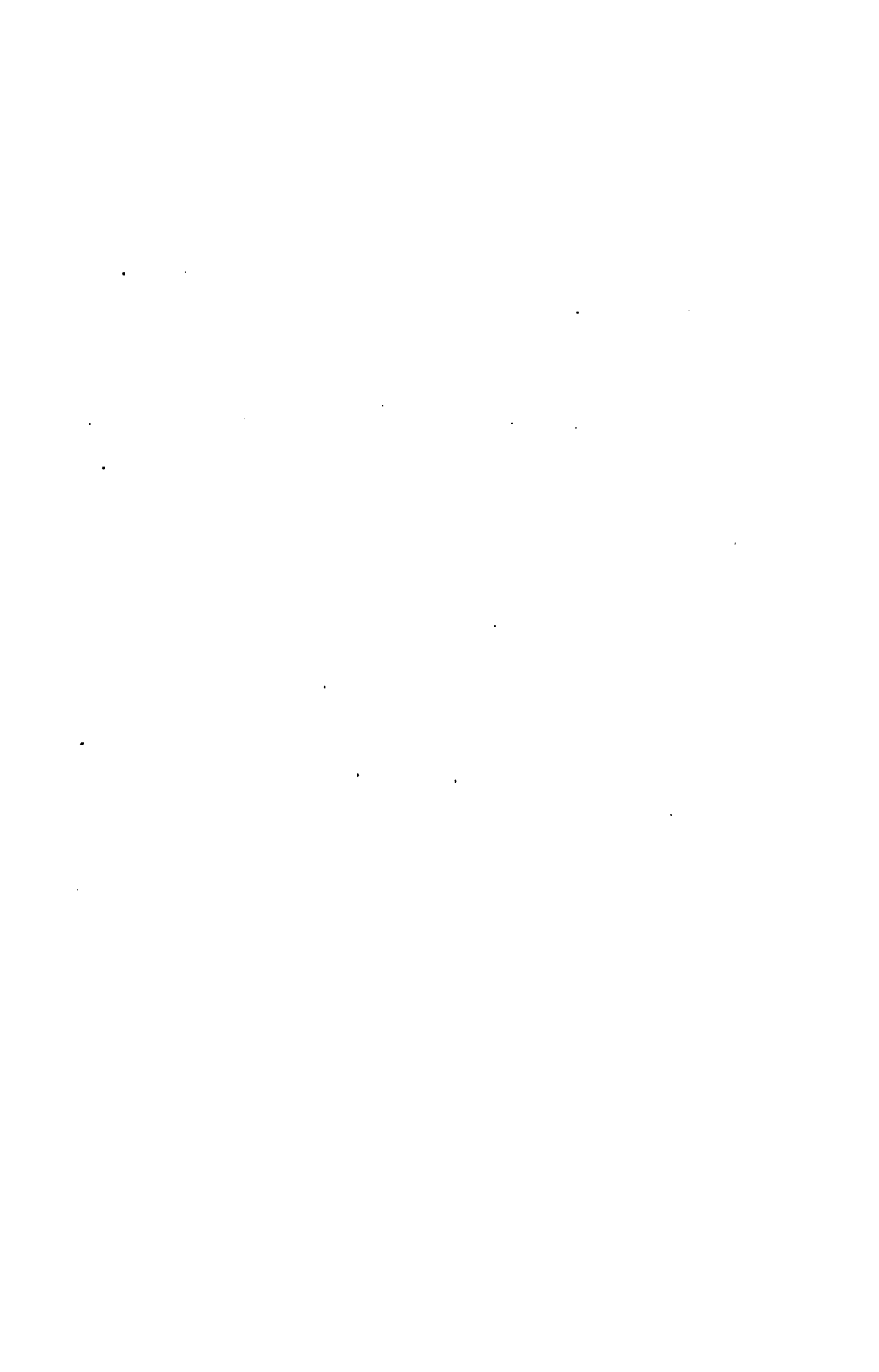


FROM THE
BRIGHT LEGACY

One half the income from this Legacy, which was received in 1880 under the will of

JONATHAN BROWN BRIGHT
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HENRY BRIGHT, JR.,
who died at Watertown, Massachusetts, in 1686. In the absence of such descendants, other persons are eligible to the scholarships. The will requires that this announcement shall be made in every book added to the Library under its provisions.





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A SKETCH OF DR. JOHN PETER METTAUER
OF VIRGINIA

BY
GEORGE BEN JOHNSTON, M.D.
OF RICHMOND, VA.

*THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS
TO THE
AMERICAN SURGICAL ASSOCIATION
JULY 5, 1905*

*From the
Transactions of the American Surgical Association
1905*

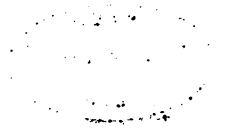
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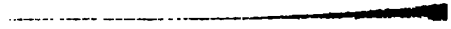


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JOHN PETER METTAUER, M.D., A.M., LL.D.



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ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT.

By GEORGE BEN JOHNSTON, M.D.

RICHMOND, VA.

GENTLEMEN: Your magnanimity and generosity have never been more conspicuously displayed than on this occasion, when you have chosen the humblest of your group to stand in the most exalted position within the gift of the American profession.

Your wisdom may be questioned, but your generosity and forbearance are so certain that I enter on the discharge of my duties in full confidence of your kindly treatment and indulgent support. It is hardly too much to say that the highest ambition that a man could nurture might well be satisfied with such fulfilment which confers by your partial kindness the foremost official position in the highest profession of the greatest nation in the world.

One of the gravest and most distinguished of historians opens one of his greatest books with the inquiry whether he is about to do any worthy work or not. Such doubt must assail everyone at the threshold of every task, but the biographer and the historian are at least more nearly removed from its influence than any other man.

In all directions of scientific inquiry the startling discovery of to-day is the truism of to-morrow, and the hand-book of one generation is the curio of the next. In literature, in which it is the main design to entertain, the general taste is so sudden and sure in its changes that hardly anything can be more certain than the passing away from favor of school after school of novelist and poet.

On the other hand, the work of the biographer or the historian is of perennial interest; and this is true for a double reason. The

real theme of these writers, whether it be made obtrusive or not, is the changeless one of human nature. This theme is presented, not as the writer of fiction or poetry presents it, colored with the tints of his own imagination, pleasing, indeed, to many through many years, perhaps, but doomed at last, save those few gems of art which genius has enrayed with everlasting life. The theme of human nature is put on the canvas by the biographer in the staring black and white of simple truth, and interest in his work is no matter of the taste of an age, but is part of the undying desire of men to know of other men. Not to the generation alone is the interest of biography perennial; it is found in a certain large proportion of the individuals of every time. In our callow and romantic youth he who can weave the unsubstantial figment of our dreams in splendid pictures of tournament and triumph is the favorite over all; a little later and the languorous cadence of an Anacreontic falls pleasantest upon an ear tuned for the first time to a woman's tones; and poetry and romance come to be the literary pleasures of our youth. Later, and we are prone to turn to books of the practical sciences, when, in the strength and vigor of our mature manhood, we yearn to do some signal service to the world, and choose politics or sociology or physics for our field. But after all the time of chatty age creeps slowly on, and then no writing pleases but biography. To know what the king said and what the Russian ambassador ate for supper; why the signature to some treaty was delayed or some gentleman missed his garter; this gets to be for us the *raison d'etre* of literature, and we have finally arrived—arrived at our ultimate literary goal. It is by this time plain to you that I purpose departing from the usual custom of discussing a technical theme on this occasion, and, following the example of my immediate distinguished predecessor, I shall present to you a name little known to recent fame, that of one of the builders of that foundation which has made the present superstructure of medicine a possibility; a character so unique, picturesque, and masterful that, if this presentation fail to please and interest you—*mihi defectus*—the fault is mine, and not my subject's.

Among the gallant Frenchmen who followed the fortunes of Lafayette were two brothers, Mettauer, surgeons.

After the battle of Yorktown the French Army was quartered at different points in Virginia. A regiment was sent to Prince Edward County, and attached to this were the surgeons, Mettauer. When the soldiers set out for home, Francis Joseph Mettauer, by the persuasion of General Lawson, the Randolphs, and the Henrys, remained in Prince Edward County, and, later, married there. A son, John Peter Mettauer, was born to him and Eliza Gaulding in 1787.

But little is known of his childhood and youth, beyond the fact that, raised in an atmosphere of surgery, he imbibed a love for this profession, and early determined to adopt it as his life's work.

In the silence of history we are surely justified by the event in assuming that the child inherited from an adventurous and accomplished sire much of his cast of mind, and that an hereditary disposition toward surgery was, in those early days when the modern practice was certainly no more than embryonic, vastly aided by that same tendency toward aggressive self-reliance, which brought the elder Mettauer to our shores as a surgical soldier of fortune.

Young Mettauer was sent to the neighboring college of Hampden-Sidney for his literary studies, and graduated from this institution with the degree of A.B. in 1806. He immediately entered on the study of medicine, and received the degree of M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1809.

Mettauer's medical education was carried on under the most favorable conditions obtainable in America at that time. The medical department of the University of Pennsylvania, founded in 1791, was the continuation of the first medical school in this country, which had evolved, in 1765, from the lectures on anatomy and midwifery by William Shippen, Jr., an ardent admirer and former student of John Hunter. Mettauer entered his medical course in the same winter that brought the death of Shippen, and he always took a "mournful pride" in having heard the last lecture of that great pioneer teacher. The influence of the character and

methods of Hunter were continued in the University by Physick, another exponent and close follower of that great anatomist and surgeon. This influence (doubtless of weight in Mettauer's entire career) may most readily be traced through all his subsequent writings in the clear, concise descriptions of anatomical and pathological relations and his tendency to the objective methods of study, which were so rare at that time, when only a few pillars had been placed for the foundation of the accurate scientific medicine of to-day. For nine years Physick had been lecturing at the University on surgery, and for four years had been professor of surgery. Mettauer was under him at the choicest period of his career, when he had won for himself the reputation of the leading surgeon in America, and had not as yet allowed the worries and depression consequent upon an exhausting practice and failing health to dim the ardor and brilliancy of his surgical achievements. From Physick's teaching Mettauer caught the enthusiasm for the lateral method of lithotomy, in which he afterward became so wonderfully dextrous and laid the basis of his great skill in other branches of genitourinary and orthopedic surgery. Perhaps the inspiration may be traced also in some of his great plastic devices.

The influence of Rush also had necessarily its permanent effect on a mind so receptive and able as Mettauer's, and he carried from his courses that inspiring love and devotion to science and search for truth which lighted dark days of arduous practice in Virginia, and upheld him in the determination which he afterward voiced. "Though doomed to labor in the country as a practitioner, I resolved to continue my studious habits and, if possible, not to fall behind the daily improvements of the profession." His methods of general treatment in certain inflammatory conditions follow closely those so prominently exploited by Rush, along with whom Mettauer pinned undying faith to all antiphlogistic measures, but particularly calomel and bleeding.

In the treatment of the continued fevers, however, Mettauer (apparently on the strength of his information based on personal experience) departed from the drastic measures of Rush, whose enthusiastic description of calomel as the "Sampson of medicine"

had been sarcastically approved by his opponents on the ground that it had killed its thousands. Mettauer advises, in an essay of 1836 on "Continued Fevers," "when the temperature is painfully elevated the surface should be sponged with cool or cold fluids, and, if desired, the patient may take pounded ice, or iced or cold water, into the stomach," and purgatives were to be used only at the beginning of an attack, or in special cases of continued constipation, a course of treatment in close accord with our modern ideas, and a considerable advance over the early methods of the last century. Further, Mettauer read with avidity and intensity the volumes in the library of the Pennsylvania Hospital, the oldest medical library in America; and we find his writings containing many references to the great Louis, who had taken the principal part in forming this collection.

Besides this, Mettauer was having extended practice in the Philadelphia Dispensary during his stay in that city, and had additional opportunities for practice through the kindness of several of the attending physicians, who apparently had taken a great fancy to the industrious Virginian. This is clearly shown by an incident which Mettauer records himself with just pride. "On a certain day, as I chanced to be on Market Street, Dr. Wistar, who happened to be on the opposite side, crossed over, seemingly to meet me; after grasping my hands with his own, he thus accosted me: 'Dr. Mettauer, my young friend, I am happy to meet you and to congratulate you on your examination, which, I take pleasure in informing you, was entirely satisfactory to the professors and agreeable to the University. You have the means in your hands for success in your profession. Continue your studious habits and nothing but bad health or early death can disappoint you;' and such a meeting and salutation from such a man as Dr. Wistar completely overpowered me, and my tears had to express the emotion of my heart in response." It was thus with a very rare equipment of scholastic and medical learning that Mettauer found himself launched with honor into his life work.

"Omnibus," it is said, "est compensatio," and every circumstance has some alleviation. In the subject of the difficulties which sur-

rounded the earlier practisers of any art, there is, at least, one compensation of which we are likely to lose sight—the speed with which recognition and celebrity come to the worthiest. It is hardly possible in our day in medicine that any man should go out fresh from the greatest college and wake to fame. With few exceptions, our own experience assures us of the length and roughness of the way that lies from Alma Mater's portals up the hill, and fame and fortune are confused in the bestowal of their signal favors by the thronging multitude of them that sue.

Not thus a hundred years ago. When young Mettauer came home and began the enthusiastic practice of his profession, he became conspicuous at once. It may be that he was aided by the lucky star; one of those which shine occasionally now on the young doctor, that guided him to a patient who, even in the most favorable circumstances, declined to die, and that the beginning of his fame rests on no deserts of his. However this may be, famous he almost at once became, and soon proved himself worthy the place that he had gained, and as he grew in age, made ever to his death higher and higher advancement in the reverence of the people, and in the estimation of his professional brethren.

Beginning his practice in much the same circumstances as most young men of his time, he was at first differentiated, mainly by the two outward marks that he went his rounds in a carriage instead of on horseback, and that he wore, certainly at his meals, and even to bed for aught that is known to the contrary, an enormously tall stovepipe hat. His work consisted at first, of course, in the practice of general medicine, with such cases of surgery as were afforded by a large community to an enthusiastic and tireless worker in this field. Gradually, Dr. Mettauer's preference for surgical work and his skill—marvellous for his day, and well-nigh marvellous for any day—began to bring him cases from a distance; and his reputation, growing as his fame, was spread in widening circles on the sea of human misery; these cases became so numerous as to occupy most of his time and to enable him to follow the bent of his genius and devote himself almost exclusively to surgical work. Patients came to him from an area that ever

increased; from the most distant parts of the United States and in some instances from abroad. Step after step the quiet country home took on the aspect of the hospital, and the whole neighborhood became permeated with interest that grew out of the accomplishments of a single man.

This is, perhaps, as proper a place as any to make some reference to the almost incredible amount of surgical work that Mettauer accomplished. Persons now living who remember the circumstances, and had more than common opportunity to know whereof they speak, have told me that for a period of about forty years the number of surgical patients who gathered to Mettauer for treatment was sufficient to keep him constantly with from 45 to 60 cases under his care. Often it was true that about every good house in the community sheltered some person who was convalescing or awaiting his turn for operation. I have heard his operations for cataract put in number far beyond the 800 that can be accounted for: Dudley's great record in "cutting for stone" 225 times in a practice of forty years must yield to Mettauer's total of 400 operations, and the number of strictures relieved is commonly put at something over 200. Three operations are recalled, performed in the last week of his life, when, at the age of eighty-eight years, his eyes were yet keen enough and his hands steady enough for him to make a successful operation for cataract, for stone, and for amputation of the breast.

Writers of renown have given us the picture of the placid rural life in old Virginia, and it is no part of my task to attempt a description of the conditions and manners of the people there a hundred years ago. It must suffice for my purpose to say that Mettauer's native country was a typical part of the old South, in which but two classes, the highest and the lowest, the master and the slave, played an important part. Of the middling sort of folk—the yeomen—the civilization needed few, and to them were relegated such employments as were beyond the condition of the slave, and beneath the dignity of the gentlemen—such employment as conducting shops and the small mills and stores throughout the countryside. Into Prince Edward Court House,

a representative old-time village, poured an ever-increasing stream of patients, who sought the services of Mettauer. From the necessity of the case, the greater part of those who came from a distance were people of consequence, and in many instances they travelled in their own carriages and with their own retinue of personal attendants, and formed at times a crowd sufficient to try to the utmost such modest accommodations as were afforded by the doctor's private hospital, and by the two houses of entertainment at Kingsville and Worsham, referred to in the phrase of that day as commodious taverns. Had Dr. Mettauer possessed an eye single to the main chance which has degraded the skill of some of our brethren, the dreams of avarice could scarcely set a limit to the wealth he might have amassed. An occasional story of a considerable fee is met with, but commonly there are circumstances of the patient's reputation for wealth and parsimony which might warrant the suspicion that the uncommon size of Mettauer's account was rather a piece of humor—sometimes pretty grim to the second party—than anything else. In this direction is the story of Mr. ——, who, with a number of new one-hundred-dollar notes held conspicuously in his hand, dropped into the office to settle his account. He handed a note to the doctor, who, to his surprise, did not pocket it, but still held out a hand, into which, after a moment's delay, another note was placed, and then, with a moment of embarrassing silence, another, and then, when the silence grew to be eloquent, another. Four hundred was clearly the limit to which the visitor could be got by silence, however eloquent, or by embarrassment, however deep, and still Mettauer held out his hand. At last he gently suggested, "One more, if you please, Mr. ——," and the gentleman, half hypnotized, deposited his last note.

Mettauer appears, however, to have placed no value on money, except as a means of carrying on his work, and an exterior a little repellant concealed a heart as great and warm as ever throbbed in human breast. A vast deal of his time was given to practice, whence he could hope for neither fortune nor fame, and this not spasmodically, but regularly and for years.

Again, the course of his work at home was interrupted, particularly very early in his career and late, when he could leave in the hands of his highly accomplished sons the interests of his local patients, and Dr. Mettauer would undertake journeys of weeks for the relief of persons who were unable to come to him. A drive from Prince Edward down into Georgia was about the most considerable of these undertakings, and we should be likely to agree, if confronted by a similar proposition, that it was quite considerable enough. It is hardly possible that less than two months was consumed in this expedition, and it is a matter of legend that the fee which Mettauer received—one thousand dollars—was regarded to be stupendous. There are no means of mapping out the trip into Georgia, but there is some reason to assume that the doctor combined with his main object several calls which he was desirous to make somewhat along his route. But, even with a considerable allowance for combinations, such a trip as this was a great sacrifice of time and strength, and it makes one of the records that shed on Mettauer's career that kindly light in which we recognize the genuine enthusiast and the self-forgetful man of science.

With a great practice then, and with an ever-increasing fame, Mettauer began to feel the need of systematizing one of the activities which, in his day, was part of the work of almost every celebrated physician. So large had become the number of promising young men who were attracted to read with Mettauer that there was no hope of giving them, as individuals, the assistance which they needed, and Dr. Mettauer gradually introduced more and more system into his intercourse with these young men until, in 1837, his group of private students was organized into a medical institute, which later became part of Randolph-Macon College. This medical school was never large in numbers, as Mettauer did not design it as a rival to any of the great schools then in existence. His pupils were generally from Virginia, and drawn in large part from circles in which Mettauer's work was well known. These young men numbered among them no small proportion, who later attained high reputation in their profession; and this

could hardly fail to be the case when one considers the quiet and freedom from distraction in which their studies were pursued, the zealous and enthusiastic spirit of their chief preceptor, and the constant spur to their laudable ambition, which lay in the close and not too-often interrupted intercourse with Mettaufer.

The doctor found these young men ardent and tireless aids in his work. Under his direction they constructed many of the necessary instruments; he himself was a mechanic of rare ingenuity, and old Peter Porter's shop in Farmville was the scene of many an important conclave from which was born no inconsiderable number of devices that to-day form part and parcel of the instrument and implement maker's stock. In my possession are not a few of these old tools of the early days of our craft—some of iron and some of silver, some made by the doctor himself, and others constructed according to his drawings by an old negro, now living in Prince Edward, who, before the war, was a cunning artificer in gold and silver.

These young men formed also a corps of nurses and assistants, such as is rarely found, and there is no question that the doctor's students rendered to his hospital work quite an equivalent for the excellent training which they got from it, even though this included that highest desideratum—the bedside clinic—to an extent which no school ever surpassed. Of course, it goes without saying that these enterprising young gentlemen never suffered the dissecting table to want a subject, and not a few of the stories of Southside Virginia which have now grown part of the negro folk-lore of the region, may be traceable to the midnight maraudings of this band.

The medical school reached and sustained an enrolment of thirty or thirty-five students. As Dr. Mettaufer was a most voluminous writer, he was also very methodical and careful in literary matters, and there exists quite a large amount of his MS., in which is the opening address delivered in 1837, when he had injected enough of regularity into his intercourse with his private pupils to make the title of "Institute" appropriate. This opening address is sincere and dignified in its modest tone, and might well serve

as a perfect model of propriety when one considers all the circumstances in which it was delivered. The speaker pleads the paucity of medical schools in the United States—there were but twelve in all—and particularly in the South, which had but three, and derives no inconsiderable part of them from just such beginning as he himself had made: the growing number of men who in past years had grouped themselves as private pupils about some physician whose success in practice had gradually forced him into the position of preceptor.

With steady and excellent results the Medical Institute was kept up until, in 1848, it became the Medical Department of Randolph-Macon College, and the “announcement” of the school under the new auspices contains the names of three Mettauers as faculty. This same announcement makes reference to graduation charges, etc.; but it is not sure that any physician went at once to his practice from the tuition of his school, though I have been able to obtain one of its early diplomas—that of the late Dr. Oscar Wiley, of Salem, Va.—a now distinguished physician and an ex-president of the Medical Society of Virginia. The session was ten months long, and credit was given by the distinguished schools of medicine for time spent in this institute. The Jefferson School, the University of New York, and that of Louisville were among the colleges which admitted Mettauer’s students on the *ad eundem* footing, and there were probably others.

An outgrowth of Dr. Mettauer’s literary instincts, and a most valuable one, was the stress put on essay work in his classes. “Memoirs,” as he preferred to call them, were liberally demanded on proper occasions, and were without doubt the means of clarifying much that was otherwise misty to the student mind.

The formality and dignity of the work done in Mettauer’s Institute were as great as could be found anywhere. The universal consent of all the old students of the school who have left behind any record of their impressions and the declaration of the distinguished men, pupils of Mettauer, who are yet among us, all force the conclusion that in no important regard was the work of his institute inferior to the highest models. Pages might be filled with

quotations from letters, addresses, and magazine articles exhibiting the appreciation in which his teaching work was held by his contemporaries, and forcing the conclusion that, had the environment of the institute been less unfavorable, it might easily have become one of the great permanent medical schools of the land.

There is no obtainable record of the formal closing of Dr. Mettauer's Institute. So far as is known, it continued to be part of Randolph-Macon College until the suspension of that school, and naturally terminated by that event; it was never opened again.

Returning to the consideration of Mettauer personally, I would remark that all the contemporary evidence agrees that he was of phenomenal skill and daring as a surgeon. His one peculiarity in operations seems to have been an invincible objection to watching any other man at work, and this peculiarity carried him to the extent of refusing assistance even in a long and exhausting case. The reason probably lay partly in his nervous need to keep occupied in order to distract his attention from the patient's suffering, which in the preanæsthetic days must have been a serious trial to the sympathetic surgeon; and it is likely that Mettauer was moved also by the need for haste and the knowledge of what unerring and lightning skill lay in his supple hands.

No characterization of Mettauer could be complete unless it took note of the practical common-sense which guided him in his work whenever there was no other guide to be found in his own experience or in that of other men. In employing the methods suggested in the most advanced journals he was by no means sure to follow even remotely the details of an operation. An instinct enabled him to grasp the essential of the matter, and, this accomplished, he was rather more likely to improve and to shorten the details than to follow in the track laid down by him who first described some new method. In exactly the same direction it mattered not seriously to Mettauer whether he had an instrument of the make of the most celebrated shops or of his own fashioning, or none at all. To turn any sort of thing into a reasonably sufficient tool was a common trick of his, and hence we read of emergency catheters made out of pipe-stems and of every sort of em-

ployment of the commoner articles of daily use to serve some professional turn.

When one calls an American country surgeon of the old day "daring," he has in mind no trace of the fussy, vain desire for notoriety, which we sometimes now associate with the advertising surgeon, and which some writers have pretended to discover among some of the surgeons of France. Surgical daring is a matter of the *when*, not of the *what*. The ancient poet gives oak and triple brass about the breast to him who first trusted his frail bark to the savage deep, and now the trackless highways of the ocean are safe as highways of the land. In the sense that he was far ahead of his age, and only in that sense, was Dr. Mettauer a daring surgeon. Many of his operations would stamp him as a high leader in surgical advance, and on several of these the fame of an ordinary or even an ordinarily great man might securely rest. But Mettauer's most brilliant work in the way of operations was his method with vesicovaginal fistula, and his successful employment of wire sutures made of lead, in which he antedated by a good many years even Sims, whose name is generally associated with this operation. So successful was Mettauer that he declared his belief that every case of this sort was curable by his method, and, so far as his efforts were reported, I am not aware that he ever failed in one. Proper pride and regard for his own reputation in the coming years must make every surgeon careful to a degree in assigning credit for useful and honorable achievements to those who have preceded him, and there is in the history of surgery no claim more clear and unmistakable than that of John Peter Mettauer to the honor of discovery in this case, and he is plainly entitled to rank in medical history and in the grateful memory of his successors in the same class with McDowell and Dudley and Sims and Mott.

Strangely enough, Mettauer's isolated position and his little conspicuous way of life have barred him from well-earned fame, and he is not even mentioned in some such works as Mumford's *Narrative of Medicine* and Park's *History*. Even where it would appear that circumstances demanded a thorough knowl-

edge of Mettauer and of his work, the reference to him is so slight as to be slighting. In 1858 Sims takes occasion to rebuke an old associate of his for the attempt to defraud him of the credit of the use of silver sutures in vesicovaginal fistula. His reference to Mettauer, even in these circumstances, is so slight that at first reading I overlooked it. He says in part, "In 1845 I conceived the idea of curing vesicovaginal fistula," etc. Mettauer's first reference to the matter appeared in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. xxii. p. 154, *twelve years* before Sims' communication, and it clearly outlines the operation which ought always to be associated with his name. In the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, new series, vol. xiv. p. 117, *five years* before Sims' communication, Mettauer says, "I am decidedly of the opinion that every case of vesicovaginal fistula can be cured, and my success justifies the statement." It seems almost marvellous that so little should be known of Mettauer, when we go on to say that his was clearly the earliest operation for cleft palate performed in the Western world (he used for the work a novel instrument made for the purpose by himself), and that he was clearly among the first of American surgeons in adopting or adapting the best of the advance suggested by any other man. He was, also, the original suggester of the employment of iodine in the treatment of scrofula, and among the first in such major operations as amputation of the shoulder, ligation of the carotid, and resection of the superior maxilla. And last, but not least, it is by no means sure that, in the care and detail of his preparations, he may not be ranked as the American Lister, and it is certain that the excellence of his precaution seems almost, by a sort of invested inheritance, to have come to him from some advanced man of our day.

Dr. Mettauer was a man of striking appearance; tall, well-formed, and robust; his piercing black eyes were shadowed by a heavy fringe of brow, and above arose a forehead high and of the most intellectual shape. He was seclusive in his habits, and few persons were admitted to any closeness of acquaintance, and very few to any sort of intimacy. In fact, from the first dawn of manhood to his death he was busy. His practice with the patients who

came to him in his office at home and that at Farmville, where he was to be found at certain hours every day, would have appalled the average worker; his medical school was, in the language of our streets, a good deal more than one man's job, and, in addition, he did an amount of writing which would have kept the ordinary scientific man engaged all of his time, and satisfied him wholly with himself. To this eternal business may be attributed much of Mettauer's failure in the social duties, and it is vain to inquire whether, in other circumstances, he might have been more approachable. That he was master of some, at least, of the social charms is witnessed by the fact that he was four times married, and in each instance to a woman of attraction and excellent social connections.

To an extent, which never failed to make his character of interest, but which never subjected him to ridicule, Mettauer was eccentric. There was, indeed, about him that which would have saved him from ridicule, even had he been far more eccentric than he was. I have referred to his invariable custom of wearing on all occasions and at all times a preposterously tall hat. One of his children, now surviving, has told me that she never saw her father without his hat on. He never attended service in the churches, and the explanation was always assumed to lie in the unwillingness either to remove the covering from his head, or to attend church wearing his hat. He would decline to take off his hat in court on the occasions when his expert testimony was sought; and the sole occasion on which a judge seems to have insisted that the doctor should be uncovered brought from Mettauer the suggestion that if his evidence were essential to the case he would be pleased to give it with his hat on, and that if it were not so, he would be quite as well pleased to leave the court-room, meanwhile, of course, wearing his hat. With posthumous insistence, Dr. Mettauer left directions that he should be buried with his hat on, and a coffin a trifle over eight feet long was found necessary to contain his body with this favorite article of dress and the considerable number of instruments which, along with a parcel of letters from his first wife, he directed to be buried with him.

It is really not likely that Mettauer's absence from religious and social gatherings should be put down to oddity. There is far more probability that the same lack of time for anything other than the tasks he set himself, which marked him out as a man without a pastime, also prevented his attendance on any occasion where his professional service was not in demand.

Dr. Mettauer formed for the community in which he was born an affection which was little short of passion. He had numerous opportunities to come out into the great world under the fairest auspices, but he found when he tried it that he dragged a lengthening chain wherever he roamed that anchored him back in Prince Edward again. He once made a settlement, which proved a brief one, in Norfolk. He tried life in Baltimore as professor of surgery in Washington University, but soon the longing for his native scenes swept over him, and he came home to stay.

Mettauer's versatility was so truly great that he might have resented an intimation which identified him with any particular branch of practice to the exclusion of the others. Pre-eminent as he was in surgery, he certainly did resent what he considered the invidious attempt of some of his brethren to classify him as a specialist in that direction, and, though he would have scorned a consideration which rested solely on his writings, these were, in magnitude and in force, enough to make the *magnum opus* of another man. I have in my possession a very large number of manuscripts on various medical and even quasi medical topics. These were produced in his most active literary period, from 1825 to 1845. Among them are articles and essays on yellow fever, congestive fever, puerperal fever, Asiatic cholera, continued fever, remitting and intermitting fever, and a most interesting article on the prophylactic use of drastic purging in the early treatment of puerperal fever, etc. During these years he was a most voluminous and valued contributor to nearly every medical journal published in this country, and on my book-shelves are uncounted piles of the older journals containing contributions from Mettauer, to which the editors well-nigh uniformly assign the place of honor in their magazines.

In all respects the most remarkable of his performances along this line is his manuscript work on surgery. It would be endless to attempt to make one appreciate this by giving quotations to show how clear was his analysis and how finely chosen was his phrase. I should almost prefer to attempt to arouse your appreciation by the well-known method of the Dutchman who described Dr. Johnson's "Rasselas." "Dot was quite a leedle buke," he said; "mein bruder writ a buke more as five times as big." Dr. Mettauer's surgery contains about 3000 pages of manuscript, closely and most clearly written on the old blue legal cap paper of his day. I am glad to say that I have the original, and, I assume, the only draft of this manuscript, and a truly remarkable piece of work it is. I have no means of knowing why the book was never published. It could hardly have been for the lack of money, since Mettauer numbered among his loyal admirers many persons who would probably have been delighted to show appreciation for the benefit conferred by his skill, and to take on themselves the charges necessary to bring the book to light in case the doctor was unable to attempt it at his own expense; and this latter is by no means probable, since Mettauer, from the superabundance that he might have gathered in, appears to have had quite money enough at all times for his needs.

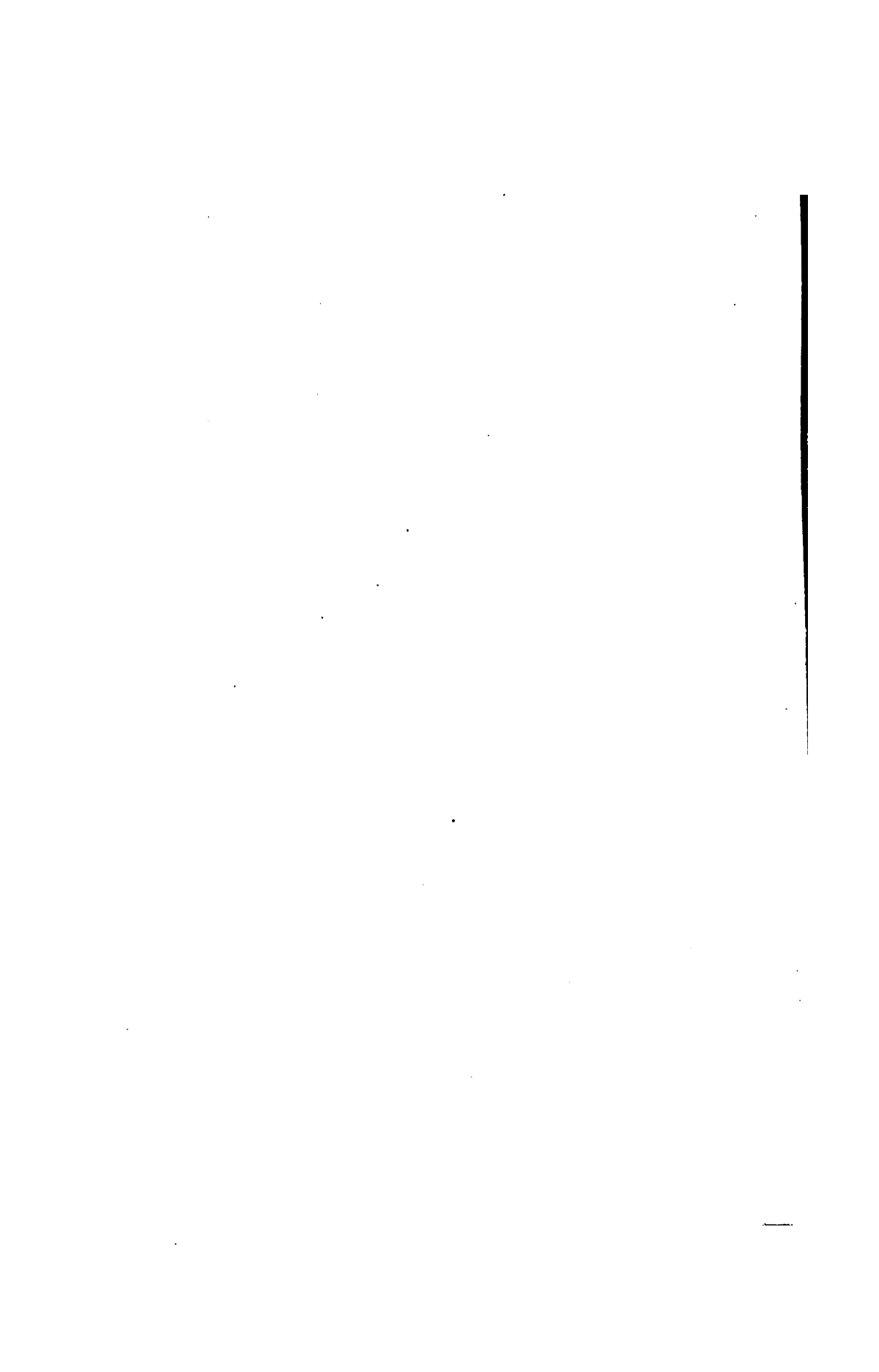
The book shows an intimate and enormous knowledge of all the directions that surgery in his time took, and not a little of the choicest fruit of elegant acquaintance with the older literature is scattered here and there throughout the work. The description of tuberculous orchitis is, perhaps, especially striking. He says: "Young persons of strumous constitutions are the chief subjects of this affection, and the epididymis is more frequently the seat of the morbid deposits than the substance of the gland. The adventitious deposit presents the same appearance as in the lungs and lymphatic glands, consisting of small isolated masses rarely larger than a pea or in the form of infiltrations, which, after a time, transmute the testis into a yellowish, curdy, cheese-like substance. The deposition may take place into the cellular tissue of the organ, or in the seminiferous tubules, which most commonly are its

recipients. There is always more or less enlargement, induration, and change in the shape of the testis, and the disease begins insidiously, is painless, free from tenderness under pressure, and often remains stationary for months, or even years in some instances. Finally, however, the scrotum becomes adherent and of a dark hue; the tuberculous matter softens, resulting in abscess, which sooner or later bursts, forming an ill-looking ulcer."

So great is my interest in seeing full justice done to the genius of Mettauer that I am seriously contemplating some extended work in the way of a biography. To this I relegate more detailed mention of his writings, and in it I hope to give some extended and valuable extracts from the surgery.

In 1875, in the month of November, Dr. Mettauer was called to attend a case of morphine poisoning a short distance from his house. He was just about completing his eighty-eighth year, but was alert and erect and as interested in his science as when in manhood's prime. A walk through the snow made his feet wet, and in the urgency of his long-continued and successful struggle to sustain animation in his patient, he neglected his own risk and took a deep cold, which, in the course of a short time, developed into pneumonia, and in two days he was dead. Surely he crowned a useful life with an heroic death. So, when our work is done, might we also well wish to pass away; our final act an act of healing, and meeting death as those who have often overcome him and have no need to fear the time when, in our turn, we shall be overcome.

But a few days ago I stood in an old graveyard, beside the spot where, his triumph and his labors now long past, Mettauer lies buried. One needs not the moralizing strain of Denmark's Prince to reflect, beside that sunken and neglected grave, how swift the waters of oblivion flow. Great as he was—untiring, bold, resourceful, zealous, a prodigy in his age and a prophet of the time to come—he leaves behind no monument more durable than this slight tribute which your courteous attention enables me to pay to the memory of John Peter Mettauer.







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